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Fish and Fruit for Food Justice Success

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FISH AND FRUIT FOR FOOD JUSTICE SUCCESS

by

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Introduction

America, often celebrated as the "land of plenty," has a long way to go to live up to its epithet: one in six Americans faces the harsh reality of hunger on a daily basis.[1] To address this problem, there are countless organizations that have made food access their mission. They provide many different levels of service, spanning from basic – giving food (often, *any* food) to people who would otherwise starve – to higher order services. The ones that take their mission a step further pay attention to the quality of the food they provide, making sure it is also nutritious, comes from environmentally friendly sources, or, ideally, both. A number of models, the most popular of which include community gardens, food banks, food stamp programs, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), and donation programs, are common in helping these organizations of all levels achieve their goals. Although the variety is endless, the most important outcome for all of them is success. Given the critical role these organizations have in providing for the 49 million Americans who live in households categorized as food insecure,[2] one of the most important questions that can be answered is: What are the factors that determine whether or not an organization is "successful"?

Despite its importance, this question was not the one I originally sought to answer. My initial intention was to address the issue of food justice by analyzing a few different organizations and critiquing their level of success. A disturbing trend I uncovered in my initial research, however, led me to shift my focus from trying to

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[1] "Hunger in America." *Feeding America*. Accessed October 17, 2013. http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america.aspx.

[2] Coleman-Jensen, A., Nord, M., & Singh, A.. (2013). *Household Food Security in the United States in 2012*. USDA ERS.

quantify success to figuring out the reasons behind the success: I discovered that many of the programs I originally planned to research were defunct. For reasons that were not yet clear, some of the food justice organizations I was most excited to partner with no longer existed. Sometimes, hearing about a program's termination took me by surprise. Other times, outdated websites and then unanswered emails to coordinators clued me in long before conversations with knowledgeable parties confirmed my suspicions. Unfortunately, doing extensive research on an organization that seemed to fit the profile of what I was looking for, only to eventually discover that that organization had stopped running, turned out to be a frustratingly common pattern. I became interested in getting to the root of why this was. My original goal was to contribute to the food justice movement by highlighting the victories of successful programs and searching for common ground among them. Now, I believe I can make a more significant and substantial contribution by communicating a better understanding of which factors result in an organization's success, which factors lead it to failure, and then using that information to establish a general model that other organizations seeking to be relevant contributors to the food justice movement can follow.

Ultimately, the my research has resulted in the discovery that in order for a food justice-oriented program to maximize its success, it should educate the people it serves, have ample financial support, and fit well with its host community's strengths, resources, and values. In order to simply avoid failure, it is vital for a program's ambitions to not exceed its resources.

Why food justice?

Food justice – especially where it concerns access to nutritious, sustainable, and affordable food – is a topic I have been drawn to for a long time. It is a framework for addressing several of the broader issues that are important to me, including human health and nutrition, social justice, environmental sustainability, and building strong ties within communities. I have several reasons for being interested in these issues. Concerning nutrition, I personally am lucky enough to have grown up not only with parents who care deeply about making sure my family eats healthy food, but also with the privilege to be able to eat this way. Leading a healthy lifestyle, and making sure that others also have the opportunity to do so, has long been one of my top priorities. I have been extremely frustrated at times when I found myself in situations where I was unable to eat as healthily as I wanted to. Just this summer, for example, I had to drive through sections of Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey with my family on an unplanned road trip after we missed a flight. The only options for sustenance along the highway were either highly processed convenience station food or greasy burgers. Neither option appealed to me in the slightest. However, I realize that while it is only under rare circumstances that I cannot find healthy food, such lack of options is the daily reality for many Americans. This situation disturbs me, and is one I am determined to change.

The ability to access healthy food and lead a healthy lifestyle has everything to do with the social justice movement. "Social justice" is a dynamic and nuanced topic that has a multitude of subcategories all its own, and is altogether much too broad a concept to fully delve into here. To give an extremely concise summary,

people of low income, minorities, and those who find themselves part of the disproportionately high overlap of these categories, bear an unfairly large share of the burden of many of the world's problems. For example, people belonging to minority races are more likely to be exposed to environmental toxins because of they neighborhood they live in, be overweight or obese, and live in "food deserts" that have limited access to wholesome, unprocessed food – and consequently suffer from a variety of health problems.[3,4,5] There are seemingly endless ways in which minorities are at a great disadvantage. After having my eyes opened to this fact over the course of the past couple of years, I am unable to ignore this discrepancy and cannot pretend that it is something that I do not want to dedicate myself to correcting.

In addition to the social justice aspect of food access, it is also very important for me to address the environmental side of the issue. To again draw on my upbringing, I grew up very involved in all sorts of outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, and general adventuring in the wilderness, realizing as I grew older that the pastimes I loved so much require a clean environment mostly free from human influence. Making sure places like this continue to exist in the future has been important to me ever since this realization.

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[3] Bullard, Robert D., ed. *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*. Boston: South End Press, 1993.

[4] "CDC Data & Statistics | Feature: Compared with Whites, Blacks Had 51% Higher and Hispanics Had 21% Higher Obesity Rates." Accessed October 14, 2013. http://www.cdc.gov/features/dsobesityadults/.

[5] Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group. "Stranded in the Food Desert: Reconnecting Communities with Healthy Food Options." LaSalle Bank, 2006. http://www.marigallagher.com/site_media/dynamic/project_files/LaSalle_Bank_Chicago_Food_Desert_4_Page_Brochure.pdf.

Resilient, high-functioning communities exist when there are quality interpersonal relationships among different community members and among different groups of community members. Several studies support the theory that for a community to be truly unified, there must specifically be interracial and intergenerational cohesion.[6,7] Psychologically, having shared goals, shared threats, and interdependence among members increases the cooperation and cohesiveness of groups in general.[8,9] There is thus a high potential for cohesive groups to form in food justice settings because everyone is free to embrace the goal of creating widespread access to healthy food, everyone can work to combat the threats of hunger and obesity, and there are inherently many opportunities for connections among diverse groups to be made. I believe that building these kinds of strong communities is an essential step to improving people's lives and ultimately making the world a better place. In today's modern world, the new technological advances that render us able to stay more "connected" every day are paradoxically leaving us lonelier than ever before.[10] Therefore, making tangible personal connections is becoming increasingly critical. Getting to know and demonstrating care for other

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[6] Seedsman, Terence A. "Keynote 2. Viewing Participants as Resources for One Another, Communities and Societies: Intergenerational Solidarity Toward a Better World." *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* 4, no. 1 (March 2006): 23–39. doi:10.1300/J194v04n01_04.

[7] Shinew, Kimberly J., Troy D. Glover, and Diana C. Parry. "Leisure Spaces as Potential Sites for Interracial Interaction: Community Gardens in Urban Areas." *Journal of Leisure Research* 36, no. 3 (2004): 336–355.

[8] Shaw, M.E. *Group Dynamics: The Psychology of Small Group Behavior*. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981.

[9] Campion, M.A., G.J. Medsker, and A.C. Higgs. "Relations between Work Group Characteristics and Effectiveness: Implications for Designing Effective Work Group." *Personnel Psychology* no. 46 (1993): 823–850.

[10] Kraut, Robert, Michael Patterson, Vicki Lundmark, Sara Kiesler, Tridas Mukophadhyay, and William Scherlis. "Internet Paradox: A Social Technology That Reduces Social Involvement and Psychological Well-being?" *American Psychologist* 53, no. 9 (September 1998): 1017–1031. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.53.9.1017.

people in one's community, especially when this relationship bridges the divides of race, class, or other differences, is an area in which everyone can and should improve. Furthermore, for those who feel like society has rejected them or who are bound by systematic oppression, the effect of someone reaching out to help can be amazingly healing.

Looking through the lens of food justice provides an opportunity to address each of these issues through collective solutions. I am certainly not alone in my excitement over the possibilities the food justice perspective provides: Robert Gottlieb, director of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College and prominent food justice advocate, describes food justice as a framework that everyone is connected to and impacted by. He has said that food justice is also intimately related to issues of the environment and built environment, land use, health, transportation, housing, immigration, and more. He sees it as an entry point to social justice – and, similarly, social justice as an entry point to food justice.[11] Gerda Wekerle, another major figure in the food justice scene, echoes this belief; in her article on food justice policy, planning, and networks, she deals with food justice as a complete social movement.[12] My excitement over the possibilities food justice creates is what draws me so strongly to the topic.

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[11] Gottlieb, Robert. "Food Justice: An Action-Research Agenda." Public lecture, Scripps College's Garrison Theater, September 10, 2013.

[12] Wekerle, Gerda R. "Food Justice Movements Policy, Planning, and Networks." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23, no. 4 (June 1, 2004): 378–386. doi:10.1177/0739456X04264886.

Choosing exemplary programs

As I have previously stated, my ultimate goal for this paper is to suggest a model that should describe any successful food justice program by analyzing strategies that have worked for two different highly successful programs. The two programs I will use as the basis of my model for success are the Fish to Schools program from my hometown of Sitka, Alaska, and the Fruit Tree Project in Portland, Oregon. What initially drew me to these two organizations was the significance of their locations. Sitka, an island community comprised of nearly 9,000 residents in Southeast Alaska, is where I was born and raised. It is my home, and is a place I love very dearly. The city is very closely connected to its environment; most citizens demonstrate great and visible respect for the natural resources that sustain the community both economically and culturally. Various community foundations currently run a multitude of innovative projects related to food justice and sustainability in addition to Fish to Schools.[13]

While I formerly had no strong ties to Portland, I spent nearly half of the summer of 2013 there. Over the course of the countless hours I passed exploring and getting to know the city and its greater regions, especially the time I spent volunteering with the Fruit Tree Project and various community gardens, I grew to love the city and gained a deep admiration for its commitment to a wide variety of environmental and social issues. In fact, it was hard to choose just one organization out of the overwhelming number of programs in the greater Portland area

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[13] "Sitka Local Foods Network." *Sitka Local Foods Network*. Accessed October 1, 2013. http://sitkalocalfoodsnetwork.org/.

committed to the food movement – but, as I will explain, ultimately I was drawn to the Fruit Tree Project.

Location is only the beginning. More importantly, both Fish to Schools and the Fruit Tree Project stand out from other programs because of the ways in which each is able to maximize food justice's potential, taking the concept far beyond its standard capacity and addressing each of the issues I said were so important to me. Both Fish to Schools and the Fruit Tree Project have found ways of addressing the issues of environmental sustainability, social justice, and America's human health crisis – all while strengthening and empowering their host communities.

First of all, both have a positive impact on the environment by employing the strategy of donating surplus or excess food. In the case of the Fruit Tree Project, the surplus is fruit that would otherwise go unharvested and end up rotting on the ground; for Fish to Schools, it is salmon that have already been caught by commercial fishermen in accordance with the official limits and regulations for sustainability.[14,15] What is so appealing about this aspect of the programs is that while providing food to those in need, it simultaneously reduces or even eliminates waste, which is a key component of improving environmental sustainability.

Social justice is intrinsic to both programs' mission. The Fruit Tree Project sends their harvests to food banks, which give directly to the poor. Fish to Schools improves meal quality at no additional cost, providing huge benefits for students who qualify for free or reduced lunches. It's important to note that although each

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[14] portlandfruit.org

[15] Thoms, Andrew. "How Does SCS 'Develop Sustainable Communities' and Conserve the Tongass?" *Sitka Conservation Society*, February 15, 2012.

program targets the underprivileged, they also manage to serve the whole community: Fish to Schools serves nutritious, local, tasty lunches to any student who purchases hot lunch at the school cafeteria, and the Fruit Tree Project allows volunteers to take home a small portion of the day's harvest for themselves.

Both programs foster community building because of the way in which they inherently facilitate interpersonal relationships and collective learning. The Fish to Schools program includes school curriculum, encourages local cultural values, elicits a positive reaction from students and schools, and is a community-created project that many can become involved in and devoted to. The Fruit Tree Project gives volunteers the opportunity to get to know other volunteers, build relationships with donors (which also encourages them to keep on giving), and form partnerships with food banks. It lets those who depend on food banks know that people care enough about their wellbeing to not only make sure they keep getting food, but also that their food is nutritious and tasty. There is much more to be said about the commitment of these programs to strengthening the communities in which they operate; this will be discussed later when I consider each program more thoroughly.

Finally, because the foods provided in Fish to Schools and the Fruit Tree Project are wild-caught salmon and organic fruit respectively, the recipients of these foods are receiving healthy nourishment that is unlike the processed, additive-laden products that they would be much more likely to consume if they were to rely solely on food stamp programs such as SNAP to supplement their diet.[16] This commitment

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[16] Leung, Cindy W., Eric L. Ding, Paul J. Catalano, Eduardo Villamor, Eric B. Rimm, and Walter C. Willett. "Dietary Intake and Dietary Quality of Low-income Adults in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

to health is crucial; current statistics report that half of all Americans are either overweight or obese.[17] Especially disturbing is the fact that minorities and the poor are disproportionately likely to be overweight and experience the health consequences associated with obesity, making the fact that these programs target these at-risk groups even more important.[18] It was this combination of factors – human health, environmental stewardship, social justice, and community building, each of which Fish to Schools and the Fruit Tree Project demonstrated a strong commitment to – that resulted in my decision to select them for my analysis.

Guiding structure

As I have stated, my ambition for this thesis is to explore the question of what makes a program aimed at providing a community with healthy, sustainable food successful by analyzing two distinct examples of programs that have prospered. To do this, I will first explain the methods I used to address this question, which consists of three parts: defining the metrics of "success," singling out the factors that result in this success, and determining the program's potential for growth beyond its established scope. Next, I will offer a detailed analysis of each program individually with the goal of understanding its functionality through its history, strategies, the impression it makes on the community, and critiques. I will follow up with an overview of the organizations I initially sought to work with that were

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Program." *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 96, no. 5 (November 1, 2012): 977–988. doi:10.3945/ajcn.112.040014.

[17] Go A.S. et al. Heart disease and stroke statistics – 2013 update: a report from the American Heart Association.

[18] Ibid.

failures, my goal here being to understand *why* they failed and look for patterns that might have lead to their failure. Finally, I will summarize what I have learned about what successful programs are doing right and what failed programs did wrong, presenting a general model suggesting that educating participants, matching the physical and social conditions of the community, and securing sufficient funding are the most important factors for success. In sharing what I have learned about what it takes to succeed, I hope to enable more organizations to make a difference in the highly flawed and unjust food system that exists today.

Methodology

Attaining one decisive answer to the multifaceted question of what makes a program successful is tricky. Thus, I chose to approach the question from a variety of different angles: First, it will be necessary to define "success." Then, I will single out factors that likely enable a program to fulfill this definition of success. Finally, because having a long-term vision for growth is an important component of success, each program's potential for future expansion must be assessed. These three components will comprise the core of my answer. Although these preliminary expectations of what determines success will guide my research, it will be vital throughout the process to find *unpredicted* factors that could be equally or even more significant in determining success.

I used a number of different strategies to obtain the knowledge from which my findings will arise: I amassed my own firsthand experiences (for example, volunteering with the Portland Fruit Tree Project over the summer) with scholarly research; information found on the programs' websites, blogs, and other media outlets; and insights from phone interviews in which I talked to program coordinators and community members who were involved. The result of incorporating these different sources was a base of information solid enough to allow me to confidently draw conclusions.

Defining success

Although there are clearly many factors involved in the definition of success, in order to develop one cohesive definition, I considered the three that I believe to

be the most influential. The first and most important is whether or not a program meets its own internal goals. The best way to determine these goals is to speak directly with the programs' coordinators, which I have done through phone interviews as well as in-person conversations. Not only have the coordinators provided valuable input as to what the projects' goals truly are, they have also been able to articulate the ways in which the program is meeting those goals and what is still left to accomplish in the future. In defining success, it is essential to include the perspectives of people who run an organization because a program needs to be successful by its own standards, not just the ones I as a third party have developed. Furthermore, an earlier study found that an organization's effectiveness is directly correlated with how effective its constituents perceive it to be.[19] This association demonstrates the degree to which the judgments of the parties involved truly do matter in a very tangible way. Without internally recognized success, it is likely that a program will quickly be discontinued. Lastly, in analyzing an organization's achievement of its own goals, I also considered one more question: if an organization is *not* currently meeting its objectives, is it likely to do so in the near future?

The second part of defining success involves answering the question of whether or not a program addresses a variety of issues. I chose Fish to Schools and the Fruit Tree Project because each has the ability to provide solutions to problems concerning human health, environmental sustainability, social justice, and community building; but clearly these are not the only issues it is possible to tackle.

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[19] Boyne, George A. 2003. Sources of Public Service Improvement: A Critical Review and Research Agenda. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 13(3): 367-94.

A program's ability to address a wide variety of problems is what differentiates a weak but technically "successful" program from one that is truly a resounding success and can maximize its impact. I believe that such impact is essential because if a program has very little influence, it cannot rightly be called successful in the first place.

The third and final consideration is whether a program has the support and the resources it needs to continue into the future. Indicators of future viability might include community enthusiasm, a committed base of volunteers, and ample funding or financial support. I selected Fish to Schools and the Fruit Tree Project because their current success indicates that they have thus far been able to sustain themselves. However, what this criterion should really indicate is that a program is designed to last for as long as it is needed, and that it is not merely a short-term "band aid" for the food access problems of its host community.

Success factors

There are many different elements that have the potential to lead a program to success. Although there are far too many to list, and additionally there are many more that will only be revealed by analyzing what has worked for each program under study, there are a few fundamental success factors that I believe can be identified right away. These are the characteristics I will initially look for in Fish to Schools and the Fruit Tree Project; however, only a detailed investigation will prove whether or not my prediction of their significance is correct.

One of the most basic things I believe a program can do to be successful is to address a specific need that its host community demonstrates. For example, if the community is extremely affluent and has no demonstrable poverty, a food bank will be unnecessary in that location. It is important for any organization to reflect a community's existing situation and demonstrate a commitment to providing services that will do the most good there. An important part of being relevant to a community and its needs is a program's ability to mesh well with local culture, which is my next predicted success factor. A program should match the strengths and weaknesses of the region (or better yet the specific community) in which it is located, not follow a cookie-cutter model that renders it unable to be differentiated from nationwide implementations of programs with similar goals. Wekerle's work supports the use of local specificity as a predictor of success; she highlights the place-based nature of food justice, remarking that "[f]ood justice movements … challenge the global food system at various scales and create locally grounded alternatives to global food systems based on visions of a more just society."[20]

A third factor that could lead to a program's success is how positively community members have reacted to it. If a program is not well received and supported, this is a sign that it creates tension in the community, which is the opposite of the unifying effect that it should have. Here, I believe that true enthusiasm from locals, not merely acceptance, is important; passionate support demonstrates that citizens, governments, and other parties are committed to supporting the program and will want to dedicate resources to it. Furthermore,

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[20] Wekerle, Gerda R. "Food Justice Movements Policy, Planning, and Networks." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 23, no. 4 (June 1, 2004): 378–386. doi:10.1177/0739456X04264886.

community enthusiasm is crucial because it is an indicator that the project reflects the desires of the community itself, not some outside force. Research by Julie Guthman, associate professor of community studies at UC Santa Cruz, supports this theory. In her studies of food justice and its relationship with human populations, Guthman finds that a major problem with making healthy food available in communities of color has been the subtle "whiteness" of many access programs. In such instances, members of the community feel disconnected from the activity that is intended to cater to their needs; these projects fail to resonate with them.[21] Locals who are clearly excited about and actively involved with a program are likely experiencing the opposite state: engagement and satisfaction.

A program should strive to be ambitious, but not excessively so. Ideally, it should achieve a healthy balance of having high aspirations and being realistic. High ambitions are the only way to make a substantial impact, so a program should always be trying to reach higher. Accordingly, I will examine how both Fish to Schools and the Fruit Tree Project are trying to extend and expand their reach. If a program's ambitions are *too* high, however, it will fail, or at least fail to be sustainable into the future. A good measure of ambition is the scale a program operates on: it is important that the scale be appropriate for the size of the community, the magnitude of the community's demonstrated need, and the resources that are available. According to a meta-analysis by Fernandez and Rainey, resources are one of the eight most important factors in implementing

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[21] Guthman, Julie. "Bringing Good Food to Others: Investigating the Subjects of Alternative Food Practice." *Cultural Geographies* 15, no. 4 (October 1, 2008): 431–447. doi:10.1177/1474474008094315.

organizational change.[22] Due to the change-based nature of the food justice movement, these findings are highly applicable to my analysis as well.

The last factor I predict will be an indicator of success is diversity in who can access the program. Although from a justice standpoint the primary beneficiaries should be people of low income, access should not be limited to only this one demographic. Ideally, as long as no cost comes to those most in need, as many community members as possible should be able to take advantage of the benefits a program can provide.

Finally, I will search for additional factors that are specific to each situation. Although I have predicted that addressing a specific need, fitting well with local culture, eliciting a positive reaction from the community, balancing ambition with realism, and being widely accessible are qualities a program can exhibit that will likely lead it to succeed, there are undoubtedly characteristics I have not thought of. Fish to Schools and the Portland Fruit Tree Project will certainly have developed their own creative methods of achieving success, and it is one of my main tasks to discover and outline these ways.

Growth potential

A higher-order determinant of success is whether or not expansion is feasible for a program. To satisfy this condition, it must be realistic for a program to be expanded to either impact a greater number of people, or provide a greater quality or quantity of services to those it already reaches. For example, I wanted to establish

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[22] Fernandez, Sergio, and Hal G. Rainey. "Managing Successful Organizational Change in the Public Sector." *Public Administration Review* (April 2006): 168–176.

whether or not a program could be implemented in other communities with similar demographics, or if its array of services could be increased. I believe it is vital to include growth in the definition of success because, as research by George Boyne indicates, there is a connection between growth and effectiveness. Boyne traces this linkage back to resource availability, asserting that "organizations that obtain the biggest share of available resources and thereby grow (and probably survive the longest), are deemed the most effective."[23]

Clearly, growth is a challenging ambition. Many programs struggle to merely sustain themselves, and have difficulty even considering expansion. Thus, especially when considered in the context of Boyne's findings, a program's continuous development can be taken as a decisive indicator that it is successful.

Implications

In my analysis of Fish to Schools and the Portland Fruit Tree Project, two successful programs, I will evaluate my predictions of which factors lead to success by analyzing the ways in which each program does or does not display those qualities. I will also note other strategies each program uses to meet its goals, address multiple issues, and sustain itself in the long term. Additionally, I will evaluate how each is planning for future growth. Fish to Schools and the Fruit Tree Project will undoubtedly have developed different ways of being successful, and attempting to directly apply their exact methods to all other food justice programs is not a helpful proposition. This is not a strategy I am suggesting, as it is simply my

[23] Boyne, George A. 2003. Sources of Public Service Improvement: A Critical Review and Research Agenda. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 13(3): 367-94.

goal to determine what some success factors could be. There is no specific formula for success; dynamics unique to each individual situation are what determine a program's capacity to thrive.

Focus: Fish to Schools

The Fish to Schools program has existed in Sitka, Alaska since 2010. Sitka, an island community that is home to almost 9,000 year-round residents, has been an active participant in the local and sustainable food movement for several years. A major figure in this movement is the Sitka Local Foods Network, a nonprofit founded at the 2008 Sitka Health Summit with the goal of "promoting and encouraging the use of locally grown, harvested, and produced foods in Sitka and Southeast Alaska."[24] The Sitka Local Foods Network has five primary areas of focus: running the Sitka Farmers Market; fostering the growth of both community and family gardens in the city; developing a community greenhouse and education center; encouraging the responsible and sustainable use of traditional subsistence foods; and finally, providing Sitkans with the education and skills they need to grow their own food.[25] The Network hosts a wide variety of programs that address sustainability and justice issues specific to Sitka's unique culture and environment. It is a valuable resource for those interested in the community's food culture.

Fish to Schools, one of the many food-based initiatives that flourish in Sitka, is run primarily by the Sitka Conservation Society (SCS). Sitka's Fish to Schools is a division of the nationwide U.S. Department of Agriculture-sponsored Farm to Schools program. Despite its relative newness, Fish to Schools has received national attention for its innovation and success.[26] The Fish to Schools program is sustained

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[24] "About Us." *Sitka Local Foods Network*. Accessed October 1, 2013. http://sitkalocalfoodsnetwork.org/about/.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Thoms, Andrew. "How Does SCS 'Develop Sustainable Communities' and Conserve the Tongass?" *Sitka Conservation Society*, February 15, 2012. http://sitkawild.org/2012/02/how-does-scs-develop-

in large part by generous support from local commercial fisherman and fish processors, who contribute anywhere from 25 to up to 150 pounds of Coho salmon and rockfish per donation. Currently, all but one of the schools in the Sitka School District participate in the program. Each school receives lunches featuring fresh, locally sourced fish twice a month.[27] The meals are accompanied by "Stream to Plate" curriculum, a series of interactive and informative lessons that educates students about how the salmon they're eating is connected to their community, their environment, and their own bodies.[28]

Success in context

The Fish to Schools program has several goals. Although serving local, healthy meals is obviously one important focus, the program primarily emphasizes educating and empowering the students it serves. As Tracy Gagnon, the SCS's Community Sustainability Organizer who manages the Fish to Schools program, writes, the program exists for the purpose of "connecting students to their local food system, learning traditions, and understanding the impact of their food choices on the body, economy, and environment." Fish to Schools' classroom component makes this goal a reality by strengthening students' understanding of the human-fish connection. The Stream to Plate curriculum teaches kids at an early age to recognize and appreciate how fish are caught, where they come from, how and why the

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sustainable-communities-and-conserve-the-tongass-here-is-how-we-try-to-do-it-with-the-fish-to-schools-program/.

[27] Gagnon, Tracy. Phone, November 6, 2013.

[28] Gagnon, Tracy. "Stream to Plate." *Sitka Conservation Society*, November 6, 2013. http://sitkawild.org/2013/11/stream-to-plate/.

community and environment depend on them, and why such lessons are relevant in their lives. [29]

In addition to meeting its own goals, addressing a variety of different issues is also an integral part of any program's success – and tackling multiple problems is something Fish to Schools excels in. The program improves the health of Sitka's youth by bringing nutritious meals to school cafeterias, which have a long-standing reputation for providing unhealthy food.[30] It also fosters community building: in part through the Stream to Plate curriculum, which increases students' awareness of the processes that sustain their community and supports cultural vitality, but also simply because it is a project that was created by the community, for the community. Many people have become involved in and devoted to Fish to Schools, which has brought different community members together in the spirit of collaboration. Environmental sustainability is also an important aspect of Fish to Schools: by serving fish that are locally caught and processed, the need to import food is eliminated. Just as significant is the fact that the salmon are caught in accordance with state regulations for sustainable harvests.[31] There is also a strong social justice aspect to Fish to Schools: the program is integrated with the National School Lunch Program, which offers free or reduced-cost lunches for students from low-income families.[32] Fish to Schools vastly improves both the taste and the

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[29] Ibid.

[30] "Schools Struggle to Feed Kids Healthy Food - CNN.com." Accessed November 8, 2013. http://www.cnn.com/2010/HEALTH/09/29/school.food.investigation/.

[31] "Commercial Fishing Regulations, Alaska Department of Fish and Game." Accessed November 8, 2013. http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=fishregulations.commercial.

[32] "Applying for Free and Reduced Price School Meals." Accessed November 8, 2013. http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/applying-free-and-reduced-price-school-meals.

nutritional value of the food these students can eat. Although privileged people tend to consider cafeteria food a greasy abomination, for many students it is the most important meal they receive in a day. A significant proportion of the calories a student eats in a day are consumed at school;[33] Fish to Schools recognizes this fact and ensures that these calories are not empty or lacking in nutritional value.

As is true for any program or organization, securing sufficient resources is a critical challenge for Fish to Schools. Unfortunately, there is no way each participating school can afford the price of the fish or the price of essential processing services like filleting and vacuum packing. Thus, in addition to relying on direct donations of fish, the program is heavily dependent on grants – particularly NAFS, Nutritional Alaskan Food for Schools. This $3 million grant, which is divided among all the school districts in the state, reimburses schools for food purchases made within Alaska. The NAFS grant currently provides Sitka's schools with approximately $30,000 each year, which pays for Fish to Schools' fish processing needs. If the grant were permanent, then money would not be such a concern; however, the grant is an item in governor's budget, which means it is up for review annually. Due to this uncertainty, the grant is not dependable and cannot be relied on in the future. To achieve stability for Fish to Schools, the SCS is currently advocating for permanent funding of NAFS while looking for some other way to access fish at an affordable price. Gagnon emphasizes that money is Fish to Schools'

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[33] *Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools: Leading the Way Toward Healthier Youth*. Institute of Medicine, April 2007. http://www.iom.edu/~/media/Files/Report%20Files/2007/Nutrition-Standards-for-Foods-in-Schools-Leading-the-Way-toward-Healthier-Youth/FoodinSchools.pdf.

biggest obstacle.[34] Funding is the factor most likely to impede the program's success in the future.

Success factors

The state of Alaska has a great need for programs such as those that the Sitka Local Foods Network manages. In Alaska, 95% of food is imported from out of state, thus requiring intensive resource use to transport it thousands of miles. Furthermore, the average Alaskan grocery store stocks enough food to last only three days; in the event of a disaster or emergency, hundreds of thousands of residents could be left without access to a stable food supply.[35] The need to address food access from a social justice perspective is also imperative, given that over 93,000 Alaskans – just under 13% of the state's population[36] – rely on programs such as SNAP, a federal food stamp program which could likely be the recipient of $40 billion in budget cuts over the next decade.[37] The Food Bank of Alaska reports that as many as 106,000 Alaskans are food insecure, a statistic that highlights the need to amend how residents of the state obtain their food. As a program that improves access to local food for many Alaskan students, Fish to Schools is helping to meet a need that clearly exists in the state.

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[34] Gagnon, Tracy. Phone, November 6, 2013.

[35] sitkawild.org

[36] "Alaska Population 2013." *World Population Statistics*. Accessed October 1, 2013. http://www.worldpopulationstatistics.com/alaska-population-2013/.

[37] Caldwell, Suzanna. "Growing Food in the Arctic Full of Challenges, Opportunities." *Alaska Dispatch*. Accessed October 2, 2013. https://www.alaskadispatch.com/article/20131001/growing-food-arctic-full-challenges-opportunities.

As a community, Sitka is extremely well suited to running a program such as Fish to Schools with great success. Despite its small population, Sitka is the ninth largest seafood port in the country;[38] it is also teeming with residents who have a deep connection to the land and are strongly committed to caring for it – qualities that are fostered either through Native heritage or simply through being raised in connection with such great natural beauty. In essence, it is hard to imagine a stage more perfectly set for a program like Fish to Schools to thrive. The vibrant Alaska Native culture alive in the state cannot be ignored as an important reason why the Fish to Schools program is a natural fit in Alaska. Pride in traditional ways and foods translates extremely well into support for local seafood and education about these processes.

Sitkans are highly supportive of Fish to Schools. Those involved with the schools, and especially the students who benefit from the program, have responded with great enthusiasm. As part of her role in implementing Fish to Schools, Tracy Gagnon works with third-graders at Sitka's Keet Gooshi Heen Elementary. She is a guest teacher for four of the nine lessons that are part of the Stream to Plate curriculum, and is proud to report that her students react enthusiastically to the unit: they are excited, eager to participate and raise their hands, and demonstrate good recall on the lesson review. Gagnon has also surveyed teachers concerning students' responses, and here too finds that the kids truly enjoy Stream to Plate.[39] Further proof of Fish to Schools' positive reception can be found on the SCS website, which boasts numerous video clips featuring students of all ages proudly

[38] sitkawild.org

[39] Gagnon, Tracy. Phone, November 6, 2013.

proclaiming, "We love Fish to Schools!"[40] It is clear that the Fish to Schools program has elicited an overwhelmingly positive reaction from the community, and has many loyal supporters who are dedicated to seeing it continue to succeed.

Although Fish to Schools is important because it is accessible to low-income students who receive school meals for free or at a reduced cost, the program serves fish to *all* students who eat hot lunch. Additionally, because the Stream to Plate curriculum is part of the program, Fish to Schools finds a way to benefit every single child who goes through Sitka's school system. The program maximizes its effectiveness by reaching as many people as possible. Because it is something that all students participate in regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, gender, or any other factor, it is something that everyone can take pride in and ownership of, which is key to its success.

As predicted, I also believe Fish to Schools can attribute a portion of its success to its ability to balance being ambitious with being realistic. Although ideally the program would serve fish more often than just twice a week, and operate in every single school in the Sitka School District, the SCS recognizes that it "must build slowly and strongly" and avoid trying to do too much with the program too quickly. Although Fish to Schools is doing great things and has the potential to do even more, it must deal with constraints. Other than finances, currently the greatest hurdles are limited fish supply and coordinating with various stakeholders – particularly in foodservice. As Gagnon emphasizes, everyone is extremely busy, and working with

[40] sitkawild.org

Fish to Schools is not their highest priority.[41] There will always be obstacles, but by acknowledging the restrictions that exist and recognizing the reasons behind them, the SCS learns where to focus so it can grow and improve in the future.

The importance of education

One of the factors most integral to the success of Fish to Schools is one that I had not predicted: the program's strong educational component. This distinctive element is not one that is typically emphasized so heavily, if at all, in food justice programs. For Fish to Schools, however, it can be called the most important objective. Without the education Stream to Plate provides students, the delicious meals that took so much effort to organize would lack context and relevance. Valuable opportunities to teach students about how their lives are inextricably connected to the ocean, streams, and forests in the world around them would be missed.

The educational aspect of Fish to Schools is so integral to the program that it cannot be limited to just the classroom. One objective the SCS hopes to accomplish in the coming months is to make the Stream to Plate curriculum available through their website so that anyone, regardless of their age or school enrollment status, can access the lessons online.[42]

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[41] Gagnon, Tracy. Phone, November 6, 2013.

[42] Gagnon, Tracy. "Stream to Plate." *Sitka Conservation Society*, November 6, 2013. http://sitkawild.org/2013/11/stream-to-plate/.

Future outlook

The most encouraging feature of Fish to Schools is its potential for growth. Tracy Gagnon has emphasized her focus on expansion, citing statewide implementation as a future goal. In working towards this objective, it will undoubtedly be easier for Fish to Schools to operate in some regions over others. While nearby communities in Southeast Alaska that are geographically, economically, and demographically similar to Sitka could be ready to follow suit almost immediately, communities in the state's interior will face more challenges because of their distance from the ocean. However, bringing Fish to Schools to these more remote areas is entirely achievable. If the NAFS grant, which can be used to fund purchases from anywhere in the state, were to receive permanent funding, then distribution from coastal to interior communities would be eligible for support. Conversely, this would also mean that Sitka and other Southeast communities could supplement its fish with vegetables and grains from the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley.[43]

Fish to Schools also aims to become a permanent part of schools. Ideally, it would become integrated into the school itself instead of remaining a program run by an outside organization. Another goal is expanding Stream to Plate to be taught throughout the year. It is an important aspect of future growth to secure permanent funding, which would ensure its sustainability for years to come.[44] However, in the midst of its current success and bright future ambitions, it is worth remembering that program is fairly young. It only began in 2010, but has already done a lot and is

[43] Gagnon, Tracy. Phone, November 6, 2013.
[44] Ibid.

reaching ever higher. If it has already achieved so much in just a few short years, there is no telling what it can achieve in both the near and far future.

Critiques

Although Fish to Schools is clearly highly successful, it is not perfect. One shortcoming is that it only provides fish twice a month; it is questionable whether or not this limited frequency is really enough to provide any significant nutritional benefit to kids. It could likely be more of a gateway to healthier lifestyles in general – and while this is not necessarily a bad thing, it does diminish the impact the program is able to make as a singular entity.

Another concern is the extent to which students actually take advantage of the meals. Although there is evidence that students at the local elementary and middle schools have responded with enthusiasm,[45,46] at Mt. Edgecumbe High School, a boarding school located in Sitka that primarily serves non-local students hailing from small Native villages elsewhere in the state, the situation is evidently a little different. Helen Raschick, the wife of one of Mt. Edgecumbe's teachers and a regular attendee of the high school's dinners, recalls an experience she had during one of the Fish to Schools-sponsored meals: Despite the offering of salmon, she noticed that every student who sat down at her table opted for their usual meal choice of pizza. At last, one student arrived with a plate of the salmon – and remarked with surprise that it was delicious. She offered bites to other students at the table, who agreed that the salmon was indeed tasty. Evidently, it was not normal for students

[45] Ibid.
[46] sitkawild.org

at the high school to eat the fish, which casts doubt upon the idea that Fish to Schools is truly enjoyed and utilized by all.[47]

Lessons from Fish to Schools

As an overall highly successful program that also has room for growth and improvement, much can be learned from Fish to Schools. In order to be successful, it meets a demonstrated need by improving food access in a state that suffers from food insecurity. It is place-specific and specially tailored to work with the strengths and resources the community of Sitka has to offer. It enables members of the community to gather together in collaboration. It involves as many people as possible, both as recipients of meals and as recipients of education. Although obtaining secure resources is an area in which Fish to Schools still struggles – if Fish to Schools' sustaining grant is discontinued, the program will have no means of continuing – because of this it demonstrates the importance of having stable and sufficient funding. One of the greatest reasons for its success is how the program involves those it serves by educating students through Stream to Plate. The takeaway from Fish to Schools is *not* that all organizations with a food justice focus should work to incorporate fish in school meals and teach about the process; this works in Sitka because salmon is a valuable resource there that cannot be unlinked from the place, its citizens, its economy, or its history. Rather, the greatest lesson to be learned from Fish to Schools is that success must come from the heart of a place,

[47] Raschick, Helen. Phone, October 25, 2013.

feeding off the spirit of the people, and utilize the unique resources that are abundant there.

Focus: Portland Fruit Tree Project

In 2006, a small group of people from neighborhoods in North and Northeast Portland joined together in an effort to donate extra fruit from trees in their yards to people in need. People from all over the city noticed and admired their small-scale crusade and wanted to get involved. The project grew into what is now called the Portland Fruit Tree Project (PFTP), an official 501(c)3 nonprofit that operates throughout the entire Portland metro area. In the years following its inception, the PFTP hired staff, established an office headquarters, and expanded its services to include a variety of workshops, events, and volunteer opportunities. Today, the Project sends nearly 50,000 pounds of fresh fruit to Portland's food banks each year, which helps feed over 9,000 food-insecure families.[48]

Portland is located in the Willamette Valley, Oregon's most agriculturally diverse region. The valley maintains a relatively mild climate year-round, experiencing cool, wet winters and warm, dry summers. Extreme temperatures are rare and moisture is abundant during most months of the year. These climatic conditions facilitate long growing seasons, and as a result numerous orchards flourish throughout the valley.[49] In addition to caring for their orchard trees, Portland residents also exhibit a great commitment to maintaining their "urban forest" of street, park, and private property trees throughout the city.[50] Furthermore, there is an abundance of private homes with yards featuring fruit-

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[48] http://portlandfruit.org/about/

[49] Taylor, George H., and Alexi Bartlett. *The Climate of Oregon: Climate Zone 2, Willamette Valley*. Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon Climate Service, March 1993.

[50] "Urban Forestry." Government. *Parks & Recreation*, 2013. http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/38294.

bearing trees. The high number of fruit bearing trees of all types in Portland works to the PFTP's advantage, as these trees are the program's lifeblood.

The PFTP organizes several different harvest structures. Individuals and families can sign up via the program's website to join "harvest parties" alongside other members of the community. Organizations fill out an application form if they are interested in volunteering as a unit or want to hold a special benefit harvest. In addition to harvesting, the PFTP also offers many other volunteer opportunities. Interested individuals have the chance to become tree scouts or harvest leaders, join community orchard work parties, serve as fruit monitors, become a "PFTP ambassador" and conduct outreach on the Project's behalf, or join or lead a tree care team. Those with more advanced skills can host teaching workshops. The PFTP also offers three to four student internships per year.

From an educational standpoint, the PFTP teaches proper fruit tree care through community lessons and holds fruit preservation workshops regularly. Additional informative resources concerning harvest skills are available on the website. The scope of the Project's influence is huge: in 2012 alone, the PFTP organized 88 community harvest events at 129 different locations. Nearly 700 participants – many of whom participated in multiple events – were involved. These volunteers harvested 66,764 pounds of fruit, approximately 73 percent of which was distributed to local food banks. 190 people attended the 18 tree care and food preservation workshops the Project hosted. There are over 4,000 trees registered

with the PFTP – 2,217 in the city itself and 1,865 in orchards just outside of city limits – over half of which were newly registered this year.[51]

Success in context

The PFTP's goal is extraordinarily simple: to provide access to healthy food for the community of Portland. Its mission statement reads as follows:

> Portland Fruit Tree Project is a grass-roots non-profit organization that provides a community-based solution to a critical and growing need in Portland and beyond: Access to healthy food. By empowering neighbors to share in the harvest and care of urban fruit trees, we are preventing waste, building community knowledge and resources, and creating sustainable, cost-free ways to obtain healthy, locally-grown food.[52]

This statement makes it clear that the PFTP is concerned with more than simply the social justice aspect of providing food to citizens in need. Sustainability, human health, and community building – all of which are topics I listed as four of the most important issues that can be addressed today – are integral to its mission as well.

The PFTP follows a model of donating surplus resources, which allows it to address environmental sustainability along with social justice. As Raj Patel, a highly acclaimed writer, activist, and academic who specializes in equitable food systems, contends, underproduction is not the reason for hunger; inequalities in the distribution structure are to blame.[53] In fact, as much as 40% of food in the United

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[51] http://portlandfruit.org/about/

[52] portlandfruit.org

[53] Patel, Raj. "Feeding the Future - A Short History of Good and Bad Ideas to Feed the World." Public lecture, Sc, September 17, 2013.

States is never eaten, instead finding a place in trashcans bound for the landfill, or perhaps a in compost bin.[54] While composting is typically lauded as a sustainable practice that is good for the environment, this otherwise commendable habit becomes just another frustrating form of waste when the fact that millions of people go hungry every day because they do not have enough to eat is taken into account. The PFTP eliminates the need throw perfectly good fruit into the compost simply because the owner cannot eat all of it, resolving the waste dilemma entirely.

Promoting individuals' health is also a top priority for the PFTP, which it demonstrates in several ways. First, there is the fundamental fact that fresh fruit is innately very healthy; those who receive the PFTP's donations obtain wholesome nutritious food instead of filling themselves with empty calories. Just as significant in terms of health is the fact that in order for a tree or an orchard to be registered for harvest, it must be maintained organically – without the use of pesticides. This requirement protects the health of the volunteers who harvest the fruit as well as the health of the recipients who eventually consume it.

The PFTP strengthens Portland as a community by enabling different members to form strong interpersonal connections with each other. Volunteers get to know one another as they harvest side-by-side, sharing tools, responsibilities, and conversation. Furthermore, by going directly to homeowners' yards to pick the fruit from their trees, volunteers also have the opportunity to build relationships with donors. This friendship encourages owners to continue registering their trees year

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[54] Bloom, Jonathan. "Waste Not, Want Not: Hunger and Food Waste in America." In *American Wasteland*. Da Capo Press, 2010. http://www.spotlightonpoverty.org/users/spotlight_on_poverty/documents/Bloom_Spotlight_0509 2011 .pdf.

after year. PFTP staff members form partnerships with the food banks they donate to as well as with business partners who donate valuable funds or supplies. Lastly, the people who utilize the food banks know when they receive the donated fruit that there are people who care enough about their wellbeing to not only make sure they have food to eat, but that their food is nutritious and tasty. Demonstrating such care for one's neighbors can be the best community outreach of all.

All of these strategies enable the PFTP to address a multitude of different issues, which I have identified as an important criterion for the success of any program. Also essential for success, however, is a program's outlook for the future, and here it appears that the PFTP can expect to maintain its high achievement level for a long time. The program receives a great deal of support from local establishments: in 2013 alone, nearly sixty Portland-area grocery stores, restaurants, and other businesses made contributions by donating money or services. Donations from individuals are also vital, especially as they are often matched dollar-for-dollar by business partners in "matching challenges." A number of grants from several different trusts and foundations sustain the PFTP as well.[55] Significantly, this year the PFTP was featured in the *Willamette Weekly*'s Give!Guide, a year-end publication that highlights select nonprofits in the Portland metro area and enables donors of all types to offer their support in an easy online transaction. The Give!Guide offers a variety of incentives, including home delivery of local brews, to encourage larger donations.[56] Being featured in the Give!Guide has given the

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[55] http://www.portlandfruit.org/our-supporters

[56] "Give!Guide," 2013. https://giveguide.org/#.

PFTP significant attention and provided it with opportunities to receive donations on a larger scale that many nonprofits can even dream of.

Success factors

Although Portland is not considered a "food desert" – an area where affordable access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and other healthy food is non-existent or severely limited – there is nonetheless a great need to improve how Portlanders access their food.[57] Members of Portland State University's Urban and Regional Planning program, in conjunction with the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, prepared a report assessing Portland's status in terms of food affordability, accessibility, availability, awareness, and appropriateness. The team calculated scores for each neighborhood in the city and found that in terms of affordability, only a few neighborhoods in all of Portland could be classified as "excellent." The majority were labeled "fair" or "poor." The report's findings concerning availability and accessibility, while slightly more positive, also revealed that a significant number of Portland's neighborhoods are deficient.[58] The assessment's findings are reflected quantitatively by other food access organizations in the area: There are at least 67 food banks in the Portland area,[59] which distribute a combined total of over one million pounds of food every month.[60] The Portland Rescue Mission, an

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[57] Armstrong, Kim *et al*. *Foodability: Visioning for Healthful Food Access in Portland*. Portland State University Master of Urban and Regional Planning Program, June 2009. http://www.pdx.edu/sites/www.pdx.edu.usp/files/Foodability_Final_PDF.pdf.

[58] Ibid.

[59] foodpantries.org

[60] oregonfoodbank.org

organization directed at helping the homeless, serves up to 950 meals every day.[61] The need for food donations is immense, and the PFTP is a major force in meeting that need.

The PFTP can also attribute its success to how it fits so exceptionally well with Portland's culture and conditions. As I mentioned earlier, the Willamette Valley provides an ideal environment for growing fruit trees. It is thus no surprise that a program such as the PFTP, which takes advantage of such conditions, fits there very naturally. In terms of social culture, a great number of Portlanders demonstrate an interest in organic, sustainable, and local food, which describes the fruit that the PFTP harvests. The Portland State University report that assessed neighborhood food access agrees that "Portland is rich when it comes to active food access organizations." Evidently, the community is highly supportive of programs like the PFTP that strive for food justice. I believe this commitment from locals is a factor responsible for their success.

To do well, a program must properly balance the height of its aspirations. Its agenda cannot outpace its abilities. The PFTP has achieved this balance well. Both statistics and its extensive list of accomplishments can vouch for the fact that the PFTP is highly ambitious; at the same time, however, it is important to remember that the Project arose years ago from humble beginnings. It has not accomplished everything at once. Every year the program gets bigger and better, and although its growth has been rapid, it has certainly not been instantaneous.

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[61] *2011-2012 Annual Report*. Portland, Oregon: Portland Rescue Mission, 2012. http://www.portlandrescuemission.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Annual-Report-FINAL-for-web-pages-optimized.pdf.

The concept of gleaning, which Project volunteers do when they harvest unwanted fruit for donation, is not unique. In fact, many organizations in other cities, states, and even countries are based on gleaning.[62] What is special about the Portland Fruit Tree Project, however, is its commitment to ensuring that everyone can access its full range of benefits at *each* step in the process, not just in respect to who receives the final goods. Although the best, most unblemished half of each harvest is reserved for donation, volunteers are allowed to divide the remaining fruit amongst themselves and take it home. Furthermore, as earning a volunteer spot can be competitive given that there is limited number of volunteers needed at each harvest, it is significant that half the slots are reserved for volunteers who qualify as low-income – and the actual number of volunteers who are low-income is over 50%.[63] Thus, the focus remains heavily on ensuring food access to low-income families and those who need it most, but everyone else also has a chance to participate and reap the Project's many benefits.

The importance of volunteers

There are seemingly countless ways to get involved with the PFTP, regardless of one's age, socioeconomic status, knowledge, or skills. The Project offers several internships, over one hundred leadership roles, a variety of registration possibilities for tree owners, and volunteer opportunities for everyone

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[62] "Food Forests: All-You-Can-Eat and Coming to a City Near You." *TakePart*. Accessed November 11, 2013. http://www.takepart.com/article/2012/10/08/grow-it-yourself-trends-sprouts-feed-masses.

[63] portlandfruit.org

– individuals, families, and organizations alike.[64] Anyone interested can easily find numerous opportunities to participate. The fact that the PFTP is so accessible has resulted in a colossal volunteer base 700 strong, which is truly one of the most important factors behind the program's immense success. Although I had predicted that having committed volunteers would be key for a program to succeed, I underestimated the extent to which volunteers truly do make a difference. Having many people involved not only staffs and streamlines daily operations, it also facilitates the spread of knowledge about an organization, making it known and recognized throughout the city and beyond. When many people care about a program, widespread attention and funding tend to follow. This has unquestionably been the case with the PFTP, which has evolved into an extensive and multifaceted project that is equipped with a great number of safeguards against failure.

Future outlook

The PFTP is already one of the most major figures in Portland's nonprofit scene. This year it celebrated its 200th harvest party. It was also named "Best New Nonprofit" by *Portland Monthly Magazine*, and was recognized by the acclaimed *Willamette Weekly* Give!Guide. However, despite its current status, the Project also has lots of room to continue its growth. On its website is an extensive "wish list" consisting of a variety of necessities, which include supplies such as display boards for events, office materials, supplies for harvesting, supplies for transporting goods,

[64] Ibid.

supplies for pruning and tree care, and many other such materials. The PFTP is also continuously seeking people to fill staff roles.[65]

Financially, the PFTP's outlook is excellent. Due to being featured in the Give!Guide and the willingness of so many businesses to match donations that individuals make, the program has been blessed with a great deal of funding. With such support, the PFTP can be expected to continue growing and impact more people than ever before. The PFTP's website boasts that its "programs and accomplishments have grown by leaps and bounds each year" since its inception seven years ago, and this growth shows no sign of slowing down anytime soon. As the PFTP possesses both the opportunities and the means for expansion, the future looks bright for this program.

Critiques

At the same time, it must be remembered that no organization is perfect, and the PFTP is no exception. Although overall the Project gets far more right than it gets wrong, it is nonetheless subject to a couple of criticisms. The first concerns its donation structure: although the fact that volunteers can take home a share of the fruit they harvest is one of the factors that makes the Fruit Tree Project work so well, one can easily argue that given food banks' immense need for donations, a greater proportion of the harvest (or even *all* of it) should be donated. Even though half of the volunteers receiving a share of the harvest are low-income, many

[65] portlandfruit.org

volunteers are quite affluent. There is also a sharp difference between being "low income" and being homeless or starving.

Another factor that constrains the PFTP's ability to fully address hunger is the fact that it is not possible to survive off of fruit alone. Despite the many wonderful health benefits of consuming fresh fruit, food banks must be able to offer other types of food, particularly sources of protein, to their dependents as well. Thus, although the PFTP does a great deal to serve Portland's food-insecure population, the Project's ability to supply them with their complete daily nutrient requirements is inherently restricted.

Despite these limitations, it is important to remember that they are not drawbacks. Because the PFTP fundamentally revolves around providing fruit, it cannot be helped that fruit alone does not provide enough nutrition to completely support life. Additionally, it is unreasonable to expect the PFTP, or any program, to "save the world" and solve a problem as pervasive as hunger all by itself. Thus, the criticism that more of the harvest should go toward direct donations is less important than the reality that providing benefits to volunteers – most of whom, it is important to remember, are low-income themselves – is a crucial factor in successfully running the program. To change the donation structure would be to alter the configuration that is the heart and soul of the PFTP.

Lessons from the Portland Fruit Tree Project

Of all the things the PFTP does well, there are a couple of things it does *exceptionally* well. These present the greatest learning opportunity for programs

hoping to mimic its success. First is how it meshes seamlessly with the strengths of its host community, Portland. The PFTP arose organically out of neighborhoods that organized themselves to address issues that were relevant to them. The Project does not impose itself in any way; it reflects desires that are already important to the community and gives citizens an outlet to tangibly fulfill these desires. The PFTP utilizes its location in terms of both the physical and social environment, which enables it to rise to its highest potential.

The other important lesson to take away from the PFTP is how valuable it is to involve many different people. The project's large volunteer base has made it widely known, blessing it with popularity that in turn has led to increased opportunities to receive support and funding. Sufficient capital is key in allowing the program to not only sustain itself, but to grow. Both the PFTP's financial resources and its widespread recognition provide a safety net against discontinuation.

In summary, I believe that the most valuable lessons that can be learned from this analysis of the Portland Fruit Tree Project are first that fitting well with location is extremely important, and second that it is of great value to have many people involved. Because both locational sensitivity and widespread participation are factors that are easily replicable, they can be included in a general model of success for other programs to learn from.

Lessons

My purpose in writing this paper has been to identify characteristics of successful food justice-oriented organizations and use my findings to produce a model that can guide other programs towards similar success. I made several precursory predictions as to which factors would lead to success before analyzing and learning from Sitka's Fish to Schools and the Portland Fruit Tree Project, two highly effective programs. I believed that addressing an existing need, meshing with local culture, eliciting a positive reaction from the community, achieving a balance of ambition with realism, and demonstrating accessibility beyond just the target population would all be crucial for success.

Upon analyzing Fish to Schools and the PFTP, I found that my predictions held true; each of the characteristics I believed would be lead to success were indeed embodied in these two programs. However, factors I had *not* predicted also proved to be greatly valuable. The most robust of these unpredicted success factors were the incorporation of an educational component, the involvement of many different people, and strong financial security. Remarkably, both Fish to Schools and the PFTP had these unpredicted success factors in common, verifying that they can be applied to a variety of situations.

Challenges facing nonprofits

Before drawing conclusions, it is important to briefly look at a few examples of programs that have failed in hopes of figuring out what caused them to collapse. I acknowledge that sustaining a nonprofit is an extremely difficult task; this is a well-

documented truth that I have also witnessed extensively through my own experiences. Nonprofits face many hardships; the *NonProfit Times*, one of the top online news and information resources for nonprofit organizations, lists maintaining a steady workforce as one of the greatest persisting problems that charitable organizations face.[66] This can be attributed to a number of factors, including the transitory nature of volunteer positions; the fact that such organizations operate on a tight budget, so salaried employees are greatly outnumbered by unpaid volunteers; and the challenging nature of the work, which is reflected in the number of responsibilities each individual must take on.

There are many other challenges in addition to maintaining a workforce. I described factors that characterize success; therefore, it is logical that the converse of these factors should in turn characterize failure. Accordingly, having overly ambitious goals, matching poorly to the social and environmental conditions of a community, being ill-received by community members, and failing to address any of the community's critical needs should be major contributors to the failure of a program. All this appears to be true: Inland Valley Hope Partners, an organization with whom I had been excited to work before learning of the discontinuation of Gleaning Hope, their fruit distribution program, is a good example of how. Gleaning Hope claimed to harvest over 17,000 pounds of fruit and serve 80,000 people each year.[67] This is a highly ambitious outreach, especially given the various volunteer and technical limitations their website implies. Even the PFTP, a much larger and

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[66] "Maintaining Workforce Remains A Problem For Nonprofits | The NonProfit Times." Accessed November 17, 2013. http://www.thenonprofittimes.com/news-articles/maintaining-workforce-remains-a-problem-for-nonprofits/.

[67] "Gleaning Hope." *Gleaning Hope*. Accessed November 17, 2013. http://gleaninghope.wordpress.com/.

more comprehensive program, only reaches 9,000 families.[68] Thus, it would seem that my prediction that it is essential to balance ambition with realism is justified.

Harvest and Deliver is another discontinued program I had been planning to work with. They, too, seem to have suffered the consequences of reaching too high without a firm enough foundation of workers and resources to support themselves. Although Harvest and Deliver distributed an average of 1400 pounds of fruit per week to multiple recipients throughout the populous urban areas of Claremont, Upland, Montclair, Fontana, and Rancho Cucamonga, the program received donations from only twenty residents, and could count on the service of only two dozen regular volunteers.[69]

A model of success

Applying strategies utilized by the successful Fish to Schools program and Portland Fruit Tree Project, and avoiding pitfalls demonstrated by organizations that have failed to remain in operation, leads to the development of a replicable model for food justice success. Success factors common to both Fish to Schools and the PFTP provide information about qualities that are important to have. First, each features a strong educational component. Fish to Schools revolves around a comprehensive Stream to Plate curriculum that contextualizes the meals that students consume and teaches them about the connections between fish and many aspects of their lives. The PFTP hosts a variety of different workshops to educate citizens about good fruit tree care strategies. As each of these programs

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[68] portlandfruit.org

[69] "Harvest and Deliver." Accessed November 19, 2013. https://sites.google.com/site/sahhadp/home.

demonstrates, sharing knowledge and instruction with those whom the program serves is essential for creating change and making it stick. There is a well-known quote attributable to Confucius that states, "Give a man a fish, and you'll feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you've fed him for a lifetime." Consultant Chad Perrin offers an updated translation: "Give a man the answer, and he'll only have a temporary solution. Teach him the principles that led you to that answer, and he will be able to create his own solutions in the future."[70] This is a perfect summation of the value of facilitating learning and empowerment, and is exactly why it is one of the fundamental tenets of the model of success.

The second principle of the model is fitting in with place. This is done in two ways: by taking advantage of specific local resources, and by being embraced by community members. Fish to Schools utilizes the abundance of fish in Sitka by providing school lunch programs with local salmon, while the PFTP takes advantage of Portland's favorable climatic conditions by harvesting extra fruit that already grows bountifully. Fish to Schools is in sync with the spirit of its community because many Sitkans are already dedicated to celebrating the human-environment connection. The PFTP works well in Portland because of how many Portlanders are committed to maintaining fruit trees and helping others. Embracing a spirit of collaboration is truly one of the biggest reasons behind each of these two programs' success; therefore, it is essential to include in the model.

The final component of the model for success is financial security. Ideally, this means securing funding from multiple sources. My original prediction of the

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[70] Perrin, Chad. "Teach a Man to Fish." *TechRepublic*, November 25, 2007. http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/it-security/teach-a-man-to-fish/.

importance of "balanced ambitions" evolved into this criterion when I realized how closely a program's potential for growth is tied to its ability to access key resources. Through its great success in this category, the PFTP thrives and continues to demonstrate exponential growth. Fish to Schools also exemplifies the importance of assured funding, though in the opposite way: it remains secure at present, but the program's long-term fate hangs in the balance because of the insecurity of its sustaining grant. Coordinator Tracy Gagnon has emphasized the fact that funding is the greatest challenge Fish to Schools faces.[71]

Lacking any of the success factors I have identified inherently puts a program at a disadvantage in terms of long-term sustainability. However, the characteristic most strongly correlated with failure is attempting to reach higher than resources permit. Whether these resources take the form of money, tools, volunteers, or some other type of capital, lacking any of them will most likely result in a program eventually stretching itself too thin and being forced to discontinue.

In summary, there are three key characteristics an organization can have in order to be a successful contributor to the food justice movement: a way of educating those whom it serves, a strong connection to the physical and social geography of its host community, and ample funding. The worst thing a program can do is be too ambitious and stretch itself too thin. Organizations that take these lessons to heart will have a greater probability of operating successfully than those that do not.

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[71] Gagnon, Tracy. Phone, November 6, 2013.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the question of what makes a program that seeks to provide a community with healthy, sustainable food successful. I analyzed Sitka's Fish to Schools and Portland's Portland Fruit Tree Project, two programs that demonstrate success. "Success" was defined according to a program's ability to meet its own goals, address multiple key issues, and simultaneously achieve continued expansion and growth. After studying the methods of Fish to Schools and the PFTP, I discovered that of the many factors responsible for success, the most important were incorporating education, achieving a good fit with the specific place, and having secure funding. I found that one of the greatest mistakes a program can make is reaching too high without enough support. Adhering to this model can play a significant role in determining the success of a program. Thus, these lessons can serve as valuable learning opportunities for organizations hoping to make a difference in the unjust landscape of food systems in America.

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